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ABSTRACT

The pamphlet analyzes registration and voting behavior among college and university students. When the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1971, it enabled almost 13 million young people to vote. Over four million are students. Although voting patterns vary among and within campuses, some trends can be identified. Registration rates for students are high, but they vary depending on the type of college attended. Students more often register Democratic than Republican, and such partisan affiliation is strongly affected by whether a student lives at home or away from home. Turnout of student voters is often comparable to turnout of all voters. Black students have lower voter turnout rates but are more likely to be involved in community political activities. Generally, students support liberal candidates and issues. Instances of student influence on elections in California are cited. In the 1976 primary, Jimmy Carter had only limited student support nationwide; however, he strongly carried the student vote in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin. Factors affecting how students vote include college selectivity, family income, age, size of campus community, partisan identification, and academic area of study. (AV)

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Student Voters: Do They Make a Difference?

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Bruce Fuller*
Judy Samuelson

1977

Politics today is being debased by the polls . . . My concern is with the ultimate irrelevance of polls to the political function. It does not matter how "accurate" or "reliable" polls are within their own range. Their range simply does not encompass the whole boundless activity and possibilities of politics.

Henry Fairlie

Participation in decision-making processes vitally affecting their lives was a primary objective of student activists in the 1960s. Various social institutions sent students to Vietnam, directed what was "learned" in colleges, and defined accepted social behavior. However, students had few direct channels to influence decisions of American institutions. Self-determination thus became the theme of the student movement, as it was with the civil rights movement of the early sixties and would become with the women's movement of the early seventies.

Ratification of the 26th Amendment in 1971 — lowering the voting age to 18 — was clearly a major step toward political self-determination. Prior to its passage, many questioned whether students would significantly affect elections. Six years later, increasing data indicate that student voters are indeed making a difference.

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The 26th Amendment currently enables almost 13 million young people, age 18-20, to vote. One-third, over 4 million, are students. An additional 7 million adults, over age 20, are enrolled in college[4]. Despite documented changes in attitudes and popular impressions, students' political energy, as expressed by votes, is far from dwindling. As research methods improve and available data increase, knowledge is growing about how students vote and why.

Students' voting patterns illuminate current attitudes of youth and raise provocative questions about our political future:

- Voting is a less visible, yet potent, manifestation of students' political attitudes. Forms of political activism and issues prompting action have changed in the past decade. Yet voting patterns provide a longitudinal picture of students' political attitudes and commitment as issues change.
- Students vote in incredibly diverse ways. Campuses appear quieter today, in part, due to a stereotyped image of students in the late 1960s and early '70s. Voting patterns on the most liberal campuses have not shifted substantially in the past five years. Yet voting patterns differ greatly among and within campuses. While only 28 percent of all Berkeley students voted for Gerald Ford, fraternity residents favored Ford over Jimmy Carter.
- Since the influx of immigrants around the turn of the century, the electorate's character has been affected as much by the addition of new voters as changes in political attitudes [16]. Like women and blacks, enfranchisement of the young has significantly altered the electorate.
- The baby-boom generation is growing older. The number of 18-20 year old voters is decreasing. However, enrollment of older adults, women, and the working-class is increasing — particularly in two-year colleges. Evidence indicates that changes in students' social and political attitudes are radiating outward, affecting nonstudent youth [26]. As more older adults come to campus, it is probable that a wider population will interact with

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student attitudes. Political attitudes on campuses and/or in communities are bound to change as a result of this broadened interface.

- Students' political attitudes continue to be to the left of the electorate generally. Students at the most selective universities are the most liberal. Given that party identification is not easily eroded, a further shift to the Democratic party among college educated families is likely [14]. The best educated are least supportive of most institutions and generally most adaptable to political change [13]. The cumulative impact of these factors is unclear. Yet student voting patterns provide some hints.

Knowledge of student voting patterns can assist candidates. Several losing candidates have underestimated the student vote. Close winners have been very thankful for students' support. In an increasingly fragmented society, campuses are rather cohesive communities with shared political interests. Prior to the November 1976 election, the National Student Lobby identified 118 congressional districts where the incumbent's margin of victory in 1974 was less than the district's student population. Candidates who understand local students' concerns and possess the skills to connect with the campus community will attract support — at times regardless of partisan affiliation.

Realization of students's potential political clout depends upon voter registration and turnout.

Voter Registration*

Registration rates continue to be high among students, yet vary among students attending different types of colleges. Nationally, 86 percent of all students were registered to vote in the 1972 election [26]. This high rate of registration contrasts with a 62 percent registration for nonstudent youth (age 18-25) in 1972, and 44 percent for all youth (age 18-29) in April 1976 [21]. Precise registration figures for students on individual campuses are often difficult to obtain, given high transiency rates in voting precincts populated predominately by students.

Student registration rates were comparable to the general population prior to the 1976 presidential election. A survey of 2,200 California community college students, who were presumably less activist and liberal, conducted just after the November election revealed that 81 percent were registered. This compares to a 70 percent registration rate among all eligible California adults as reported by the Secretary of State and voters themselves in a California Poll [7]. California's new postcard registration option helped bolster student registration.

A random sampling of 1,049 students attending three California state colleges in Winter 1977, found that 65 percent were registered to vote when entering college.** It is unknown precisely how many additional students registered after enrolling. However, registration rates increased dramatically among older students. Only 9 percent of 18-19 year-old students surveyed were registered when entering college — many at that time were just eligible to register. Yet registration rates increased to 50 percent, 74 percent, and 85 percent among state college students who were 20-22, 23-25, and over 31 years of age when enrolling, respectively.

Students applying for financial aid (25 percent of the sample) registered at a 54 percent rate, compared to 69 percent among all other students. Apparent lower participation among lower income students is also evidenced by a 43 percent registration rate among students applying for the Educational Opportunity Program (serving disadvantaged and minority students).

Nationally, the proportion of all eligible adults registering to vote has fallen from 77 to 71 percent since 1968. This drop is, in part, due to enfranchisement of large numbers of nonstudent youth.

Students more often register Democratic than Republican. Prior to the 1972 election, students identified themselves as Democrats versus Republicans two to one [26]. Democratic registration ran three to one at most four-year colleges. At only two of 22 California campuses surveyed after the 1974 election was Democratic registration below the statewide average of 57 percent. However, registration patterns vary substantially among campuses. Prior to the 1972 and 1974 elections, registration in student precincts surrounding eight campuses of the University of California was over three to one Democratic. At several four-year state colleges and community colleges in California, Republican registration exceeds 30 percent. Similar variations exist in other states.

The Democratic party did not become less attractive to students between 1972 and 1976. Democratic registration exceeded Republican registration by two to one margins prior to November 1976 at 32 of 38 universities surveyed nationally. Democratic registration continues to run better than three to one at University of California campuses. Diversity among campuses continues. Democratic registration in 1976 ranged from 68 percent at UC Santa Barbara to 45 percent at Oklahoma State University. Among surveyed California community college students, registration ran two to one Democratic in 1976.

Community college vocational students reported registering at a 75 percent rate, while 84 percent of students taking mostly social science courses were registered prior to the November 1976 election.

*Uncited findings result from original research (9, 10, 25). Most data derive from surveys of voting precincts populated by students, located on or adjacent to college campuses. These data are obtained from county election offices. This methodology results in an overrepresentation of students who attend and live near four-year universities.

To explore differences in voting patterns among students attending different types of colleges, two direct surveys were conducted following the November 1976 election. First, 2,200 California community college students were surveyed to understand this diverse student population. In comparing our sample to all community college students, those primarily studying social sciences were slightly underrepresented. Second, 1,049 students attending three four-year California state colleges, serving mostly commuter students, were randomly surveyed. The results of these direct surveys are reported herein.

**Registration rates varied from 63 to 69 percent among the three campuses surveyed. The average age of the sample was 25 years, reflecting the approximate average age of all California state college students.

Partisan affiliation is strongly affected by whether a student lives with her/his parents or away from home. Democratic registration was nine percent higher among students not living with their parents — 61 versus 52 percent.

Students have reversed partisan preferences in the past forty years. Lipset [15] reports that Ivy League students favored Eisenhower over Stevenson by greater margins than the entire electorate. However, the college educated — and especially their children in the 1960s — shifted to the Democratic party. Students of affluent families are clear examples of what Ladd terms the "inversion of the New Deal class order." Between 1966 and 1974, the proportion of students affiliated with the Republican party dropped from 26 to 14 percent. The number of independents rose from 39 to 49 percent, a level 15 percent greater than the general population. Students generally become less Republican and more Democratic during their four years in college [23].

Large numbers of student voters decline to state party affiliation. In 1972, 22 percent of students nationally stated no affiliation with any political party [26]. About 15 percent of California student voters surveyed from four-year colleges claimed no party affiliation in 1974. On some campuses, an increasing number of students are turning away from either major party, as are all voters. Affiliation with a third political party has rarely exceeded two percent on any campus since and including 1972.

Voter Turnout: Active Participation

Turnout of registered student voters is often comparable to turnout of all voters. In precincts surrounding 31 campuses nationally in 1972, 73 percent of registered student voters went to the polls. Students' interest in elections is very similar to interest or apathy displayed by all voters. Turnout of California students was over 70 percent in 1972, fell to less than 50 percent in the 1974 California primary, and rebounded to slightly over 60 percent in the 1974 general election. Statewide turnout for the 1974 California primary and general elections was 54 percent and 63 percent, respectively.

In 1976, turnout averaged 70 percent in 207 student precincts surveyed nationally. Student turnout ranged to 90 percent at the University of Massachusetts and University of Minnesota last November.

Given high registration rates on many campuses, turnout of **eligible** student voters may, in certain elections, be greater than the general population, even when turnout of **registered** students is lower. Three-fourths of all students voted in the 1972 election [26]. (Less than half — 48 percent — of nonstudent youth voted.)

While turnout for all registered voters nationally was 80 percent last November (1976), only 53 percent of all eligible adults actually voted [27]. In California, self-reported turnout figures among all registered and (community college) student voters both ran ten percent above the actual 81 percent adult turnout rate. Thus, given comparable turnout rates and higher registration rates among community college students, turnout among all **eligible** California student voters appears at least comparable to the general population.

In a national survey of 216,000 first-year students one month prior to the November 1976 election, 56 percent indicated a "very good chance" they would vote in November. Strong intentions to vote ranged from 50 percent among first-year community college students to 65 percent among first-year university students [1].

Astin's national survey yielded a disturbing finding: Only 36 percent of first-year students in predominately black colleges strongly intended to vote. A higher proportion of students in black colleges than large universities feel it is "essential or very important" to participate in community action and influence the political structure and social values. However, voting is not perceived as a useful method of political influence. Ironically, first-year students in (predominately white) community colleges and large universities have weaker desires to affect the political system yet stronger intentions to vote.

Turnout figures vary among individual campuses and are affected by candidates and issues on the ballot. Turnout at Stanford University in the 1974 primary was very high when Congressmember Paul McCloskey barely won reelection. Ballot propositions have undoubtably sparked student interest in elections in California and elsewhere. In the 1976 Wisconsin primary, Morris Udall's active campaign led to a high student turnout of over 60 percent. However, where elections are uninteresting and students uninterested, turnout is very low. Research following municipal elections in Los Angeles indicates low student interest in local politics.

Voting Patterns: The Difference Students Make

Student voters generally support liberal candidates and issues. However, the size of a bloc student vote varies greatly and results from several interrelated factors. In both statewide and local elections, student voters have provided margins of victory for several candidates. Incumbents, usually conservatives, have only narrowly won reelection in seats which were very safe prior to the 26th Amendment.

A national survey of 31 campuses following the 1972 election indicated that McGovern received 63 percent of the student vote. At eight campuses of the University of California and seven private California universities, McGovern received slightly above 75 percent. Yet at less selective California State University and College campuses the McGovern vote was 62 percent. Based on these data, the University of California Student Lobby estimated McGovern's student vote at 55 percent nationally. Subsequent surveys by researcher Daniel Yankelovich found that McGovern received 57 percent of the student vote, while nonstudent youth (age 18-25) split their votes 50-50 between McGovern and Nixon.

Beyond the presidential race, students voted overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates and liberally in 1972. Nationally, 68 percent of student voters sur-

veyed supported Democratic candidates in state and local elections. Ballot propositions in California provide opportunities for student voters to affect specific issues. And in 1972, students in four-year colleges voted three to one against limiting property taxes, just under four to one to decriminalize marijuana, six to one to limit development of the California coastline, and five to one against a proposed farm labor law opposed by farmworkers.

The 1972 election provided data indicating that students distinguish candidates beyond party labels. Senator Edward Brooke, a moderate Republican, received 74 percent of the student vote at the University of Massachusetts, even though McGovern received 75 percent. Similarly, Republican Senator Charles Percy received 65 percent of the student vote at Southern Illinois University. California students at San Francisco State, the University of San Francisco, and Sonoma State College strongly backed liberal Republican legislative candidates while otherwise voting Democratic.

In the 1972 and 1974 California elections combined, student voters provided a plurality of votes exceeding the margins of victory of four Democratic state legislators, and barely (within 2,000 votes) failed to oust three incumbents.

Student voters helped defeat Governor Reagan's 1973 proposal to constitutionally limit state tax revenues, voting nine to one against. Opponents claimed the measure would force public colleges to increase tuition. Propositions on the 1974 California ballot provided further insight into political attitudes: Students at four-year college campuses voted eight to one to limit campaign contributions and restrict activities of lobbyists, three to one to block the damming of a wild river, eight to one to reduce terms of University of California Regents, and 55 percent in favor of moving power to set UC tuition from the regents to the state legislature. The latter two issues were historically controversial in California and supported by student leaders.

The critical impact of the student vote was dramatically demonstrated in two 1974 races having national implications. Student voters provided the essential margins of victory for Congressmember Paul McCloskey and California Governor Jerry Brown.

In the 1974 primary election, the maverick McCloskey faced tough opposition from conservative Republican Gordon Knapp. GOP registration in 11 student precincts surrounding Stanford University increased 80 percent prior to the primary election, where registration ran two to one Democratic in 1972. The newly registered student Republicans turned out in substantial numbers and voted 91 percent for McCloskey. Students in the 11 precincts alone gave McCloskey a 1,200 vote plurality, exceeding his narrow 867 vote margin of victory. A few months later in the general election, McCloskey received 87 percent of the Stanford student vote even though students voted Democratic two to one in other races.

California Governor Jerry Brown's 1974 election also demonstrated student voters' impact. Brown was clearly not the favorite candidate of students in the June primary. State Assembly Speaker Bob Moretti outpolled Brown at a majority of four-year colleges; Brown ran ahead of his statewide plurality at only three campuses. However, in the November 1974 general election, students backed Brown three to one. Students provided Brown a plurality of over 280,000 votes, exceeding his narrow (178,000) margin of victory.

The 1976 Primary

Jimmy Carter, despite winning the majority of Democratic primaries, gained only limited student support nationwide. Candidates Morris Udall, Frank Church, and Jerry Brown, seen as more liberal by students, repeatedly outpolled Carter. In the early Wisconsin and Massachusetts primaries, Udall received 55 and 38 percent of the student vote; Carter received 32 and 7 percent in the two states, respectively. California students on eight UC campuses gave Carter only 10 percent of their votes — Brown received 56 percent, Udall 19 percent, and Church 12 percent of the student vote. At only three (of 30) California four-year campuses did Carter approach his statewide average. When not running against more liberal candidates, Carter was supported by student voters. For example, Carter received 49 percent of the student vote in Illinois where he was challenged by neither Udall nor Church [5].

In California's senate race, former student activist and Democrat Tom Hayden won pluralities at all 20 campuses surveyed, yet he took only 38 percent of the vote statewide against incumbent John Tunney. Hayden's vote ranged from 90 percent at the University of California, Santa Cruz to a low of 52 percent at Loyola University, a small Los Angeles Catholic school. The California primary's most controversial issue, the Nuclear Initiative, received pluralities at every UC campus except UCLA. Support for the losing measure, which would have frozen construction of nuclear power plants and possibly phased out existing plants, ran highest at UC Santa Cruz, receiving 95 percent of the student vote.

In the Republican presidential primary, Ford generally outpolled Ronald Reagan. Ford's student vote exceeded 60 percent in the Massachusetts, Illinois, and Wisconsin primaries. Ford's California student vote ranged to 89 percent at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Reagan, however, usually outpolled Ford on California state college campuses.

The Carter Student Vote

Nationally, Carter outpolled Ford 53 percent to 40 percent among students surveyed at 53 universities nationally. After adjusting for the sample's underrepresentation of community college students, who presumably voted less liberally, Carter received an estimated 49 percent of the student vote to Ford's 44 percent nationally.

However, the subsequent survey of California community college students revealed little difference between voting patterns of students in two-

and four-year colleges. Community college students voted 52 percent to 41 percent for Carter over Ford.

Nationally, Carter received strong student support in four pivotal states:

- Ohio: Carter beat Ford by only 9,300 votes but won 50 percent of the student vote to Ford's 38 percent at Ohio State University. Carter outpolled Ford 59 to 32 percent in student precincts at Kent State.
- Pennsylvania: Carter outpolled Ford by 128,000 votes but won 56 percent of the vote, to Ford's 41 percent, at the University of Pittsburgh.
- Texas: Carter's margin was only 156,000 votes. Yet Carter beat Ford at the University of Texas and the University of Houston by 77 to 21 percent and 92 to 7 percent, respectively.
- Wisconsin: Carter beat Ford by only 34,000 votes. Yet Carter took 56 percent of the student vote, to Ford's 30 percent, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

These four states gave Carter 89 electoral college votes. He beat Ford, 297 to 240 electoral votes.

Following Carter's poor primary election showing in many campus communities, observers predicted Eugene McCarthy would take away significant student support. Indeed, ten percent of California students voted for neither Carter nor Ford. McCarthy received seven percent of the student vote at several major universities, including the University of Wisconsin, University of Oregon, and Drake University.

Walter Mondale was widely viewed as Carter's greatest asset among students — preventing a greater shift to McCarthy. Mondale was quite aware of the student vote. In Mondale's 1972 senate election, his winning plurality in Minneapolis was 39,000 or four percentage points. Yet in the city's West Bank area, where many of the University of Minnesota's 56,000 students reside, Mondale received 85 percent of the vote, exceeding George McGovern's support. Mondale had earlier received 96 percent of the student vote in the 1972 primary running against three Democrats.

Again, the student vote varied among campuses in 1976. Students at Brigham Young University gave Ford 86 percent of their votes. At Oklahoma State University, Carter took only 26 percent against Ford's 70 percent. Carter lost to Ford 34 percent to 60 percent at Northern Arizona University.

Carter's California student vote was also diverse. The Democrat won at all University of California campuses with a high of 79 percent at Santa Cruz. Carter captured most state college campuses, while Ford took two private California colleges surveyed — Santa Clara and Loyola.

Carter received 52 percent of California community college students' votes to Ford's 41 percent and McCarthy's 3 percent. Among students stating no party affiliation, 45 to 41 percent voted for Carter versus Ford. Fourteen percent voted for other candidates. This pattern reflects research findings indicating that most "independent" voters strongly identify with a major political party [12].

Recognizing the student vote's potential influence, candidates from both parties campaigned heavily on campuses in 1976. Robert Dole's visit to Southeast Missouri State University, Ford's visit to the University of Southern California — the campus with the highest Republican registration among California campuses surveyed — and Carter's visit to the liberal City University of New York indicated conscious decisions to visit campuses with similar political attitudes. Governor Brown also appealed extensively to college crowds, mostly in the Northwest, during his own campaign for president and later to help Carter.

Student Influence in California

Reflecting the national pattern, Carter was the least popular Democrat among students on the California ballot. Carter won 53 percent of the student vote on 24 California campuses surveyed, while defeated Senator John Tunney received 59 percent (despite his poor showing in the primary), and Democratic congressional candidates gained 68 percent of the student vote.

One House candidate, Robert Leggett (D-Vallejo, Calif) — hurt by disclosures of his second family and possible South Korean dealings — won reelection by only 717 votes. Students at UC Davis gave Leggett 64 percent of their votes. Another, seven-term Rep. Burt Talcott (R-Santa Cruz, Calif) was unseated with the help of UC Santa Cruz students, who supported Talcott's opponent, Leon Panetta, with 97 percent of their vote.

Only one campus supported a Republican for Congress. Incumbent Rep. Paul McCloskey defeated former student activist and draft resister David Harris at the University of Santa Clara. However, Stanford University students supported Harris over McCloskey, 56 percent to 44 percent.

The controversial farm labor initiative, viewed by some as a vote of confidence in Cesar Chavez and supporter Jerry Brown, was favored by an average margin of 62 percent among California students, despite being defeated.

Factors Affecting How Students Vote

Neither students nor campuses are isolated from their broader communities. Therefore, student voting patterns reflect factors applicable to other constituencies, such as candidate visibility, positions on issues, and overall voter interest. Regional differences in political attitudes also help explain differences in student voting patterns. (While Berkeley students voted for McGovern by almost four to one in 1972, only six percent of Brigham Young University students voted for McGovern.) Several additional, interrelated factors help explain student voting patterns:

- College selectivity/family income: College admission policies often stratify students according to achievement levels which correlate with family income levels. The McGovern vote averaged 75 percent at University of California campuses and eastern Ivy League schools, dropping to 62 percent at less selective Califor-

nia state college campuses. Differences in voting patterns between types of colleges diminished in 1976. For example, Carter's student vote averaged 58 percent and 52 percent among University of California and California community college students, respectively.

- Residence: Students attending more selective colleges often live away from home, close to campus. This shift in social environment is the strongest single factor affecting student voters. Students not living with their parents consistently vote more liberally, even after controlling for age differences. Furthermore, older students (20-22) show little change in political attitudes if they continue to live with their parents. Yet students who have left home vote increasingly more liberal as they grow older.
- Age: Students generally more actively participate in elections and increasingly vote Democratic as they grow older. Carter's vote among surveyed community college students increased from 43 percent among 18 year-olds to 58 percent among students age 23-29. As previously discussed, registration rates dramatically increased with age among California state college students.
- Size of campus community: Students attending large universities and residing in the campus community generally vote more liberally. The size and density of student communities, such as Berkeley and Madison, significantly affect the intensity and prevalence of liberal-progressive political attitudes. Larger campuses logically attract candidates and organized campaigns. Student newspapers appear to influence student voting patterns, and the student press is most sophisticated on large campuses. Press endorsements of moderate Republicans have increased student support even when Democrats receive large pluralities in other races.
- Campaigns: Students appear to be sensitive to candidates' ability to speak to student issues. Democratic candidates often assume that they will receive student support, spending little energy and money to increase student voter turnout. Also, Republicans assume little student support. Yet some Republican candidates have received substantial student support, often in the absence of strong campaigns.
- Partisan identification: Like the entire electorate, party affiliation strongly influences student voters. Among community college students, 79 percent of Republicans voted for Ford, and 71 percent of student Democrats favored Carter. Third-party registrants are more likely to vote for neither major candidate.
- Academic area of study: Students' academic interests also help predict voting choices. Community college vocational students split their votes evenly between Ford and Carter, each receiving 47 percent. However, social science majors voted 56 percent for Carter, 38 percent for Ford.

Student Voters and the American Electorate

Students' political attitudes have generally become more moderate in recent years. The proportion of undergraduates classifying themselves as "left" or "liberal" fell from 44 percent in 1969 to 35 percent in 1975 [24]. Yet this general trend is contradicted by other evidence. The proportion of graduate students identifying themselves as "liberal" has remained constant at 43 percent since 1969. This recent moderate shift in student attitudes since the late 1960s is hardly noticeable compared to students' drastic shift to the left between the mid-1950s and 1960s. Carter received less support among students than George McGovern. Yet students who did not prefer Carter often voted for third party candidates — Ford ran weaker than Nixon, not stronger, among student voters.

The evolution of students' methods of expressing political attitudes through political action is also unclear. Less visible are the issues which prompted activism — Vietnam, civil rights, and poverty. While ideologies are waning, interest in social issues has not subsided. Voter turnout among students indicates high interest in choosing which office holders will address domestic and foreign policy issues. Also, the focus of student activists has possibly shifted to local communities and thus become more fragmented, less visible.

If attitudes and choices of student voters retain the resiliency demonstrated since 1972, the entire American electorate may change. Liberal attitudes continue to correlate with education levels. Also, campuses are attracting a broader spectrum of students, particularly older and working-class adults. The political impact of campus attitudes on working adult students is unclear but potentially great. As previously pointed out, student attitudes have already strongly influenced nonstudent youth.

Most troublesome, like the entire electorate, many students remain apathetic, uninterested in electoral politics. At least 40 percent of the nation's student population — over four million young people — chose not to vote in 1976. A lack of identity with major political parties for many students is one factor. Yet third parties are not attracting large proportions of students, and voting choices of independents are dissimilar. Changes in political organizations may not increase student voter participation. As students move away from ideologies, and many citizens remain disenchanted with social institutions generally, for many students no conventional political party will seem useful.

Many nonvoting students simply feel distant from the governmental process. Who is elected makes little difference. "Apathetic" students may care a great deal about politics but channel their activism into local organizations rather than voting booths. Whether government and contemporary politics will in the future demonstrate greater utility in addressing students' concerns, or whether students' attitudes will change with age, remain unanswered questions. In the meantime, students choosing to vote will, most likely, continue to make a difference.

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